



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to the OSCE Project Coordinator in Uzbekistan

As delivered by Acting Deputy Chief of Mission Jeffrey VanDreal
to the Permanent Council, Vienna, June 18, 2009

We welcome you, Ambassador Venczel, to the Permanent Council and thank you for your comprehensive report on OSCE activities in Uzbekistan.

Mr. Ambassador, we are pleased to see that cooperation between the Government and the Project Coordinator's Office has continued to improve during this past year. We are encouraged by the quantity and quality of approved projects in all three dimensions and the Government's willingness to invite OSCE institutions, including the Representative of Freedom of the Media, to lead or participate in events in Uzbekistan.

We remain concerned, however, by the slow and complicated project agreement process between the Project Coordinator's Office and the Government. We hope that this review process can be shortened so as to hasten project implementation and increase budget utilization. Greater access to the Presidential Administration would ease this process. We also hope that Uzbekistan will allow the Office to become a fully mandated center with increased staff to carry out its work.

The United States fully supports the Project Coordinator's work in all three dimensions. The Project Coordinator's assistance to the police academy, its support of regional seminars on fighting terrorism and illicit drug trafficking, and its activities aimed at increasing political participation of citizens and the transparency of elections are all examples of good cooperation with the authorities to consolidate security in the first dimension. In the second dimension, we commend the Project Coordinator's work to advance economic development by promoting good governance and fighting against money-laundering and corruption.

We note the Project Coordinator's positive work on human dimension activities this year, including increasing the capacity of the ombudsperson institution and public awareness of it, providing training to the Ministry of Interior's Human Rights Protection Unit, and raising awareness of OSCE commitments on human rights and the rule of law. We believe that the Office's outreach to inform the public, academicians, politicians, and NGOs about OSCE commitments can have a very positive impact. While we are encouraged by the Project Coordinator's work with the National Association of NGOs, we would like the Project Coordinator to consult with all NGOs, not just those that are officially registered.

As outlined in your report, the Project Coordinator's Office has done a good job in working with other OSCE institutions – including the Strategic Police Matters Unit, the High Commissioner on National Minorities, and ODIHR – to advance the goal of meeting OSCE commitments by providing expert assistance. We are confident that this cooperation will continue, especially in light of the upcoming December 27th elections, in which we expect ODIHR to offer assistance. We urge the Uzbek authorities to implement ODIHR's recommendations from both the December 2007 presidential election and the 2004 Uzbek parliamentary election to improve the election process.

The United States takes note of efforts by the Project Coordinator's Office to promote regional activities and cooperation, including for example, by working with the OSCE

Secretariat to hold last October a regional conference on environmental security and safety as a factor of water management. We would like to see more of this regional work continue—whether it be organized by missions in Central Asia or through the Secretariat—and believe that the OSCE can offer a value-added forum for dialogue on sensitive issues. We look to the Government of Uzbekistan to take advantage of this offer of support and to help plan and host regional conferences, seminars and roundtables with its neighbors in the region.

Uzbekistan has been particularly helpful in assisting its southern neighbor, Afghanistan, by allowing critical non-military supplies to cross its territory. We hope that Uzbekistan, with its deep historical understanding of Afghanistan, can be actively involved in helping the OSCE's efforts to stabilize its southern neighbor. In this regard, we would also encourage Uzbekistan to participate in regional training activities for borders and customs officials, so as to create more consistency in border practices across the region and to help stem the flow of illicit goods across the borders.

As always, the United States supports the important role of the OSCE Project Coordinator's Office in Tashkent--the role that the office can play in assisting the Government of Uzbekistan to fulfill its Helsinki commitments and meet its security needs. We stand ready to support the Government and the Project Coordinator in their efforts.

Thank you, Madam Chairwoman.